AMAR CHITRA KATHA

No. 115

PAREEKSHIT

THE GRANDSON OF ARJUNA, THE PANDAVA



AMAR CHITRA KATHA

Pareekshit was the posthumous son of the valiant Abhimanyu, and the grandson of the Pandava prince, Arjuna. While yet in the womb of his mother, he was the target of the fatal Brahmastra, released by Ashwatthama, son of Drona, but Lord Krishna saved him.

It is interesting to note that according to Puranic traditions, the Kali Yuga (era) is said to have started from the year of his accession, which is also the year in which Lord Krishna left the earth, for his celestial abode, Vaikuntha.

In this book is given a mythological account of Pareekshit's death at the hands of the Naga King, Takshaka. Many scholars, including Shri R.C.Majumdar and Shri A.D. Pusalker, hold that this clash with the Nagas could be a genuine historical fact. They feel that taking advantage of the weakened condition of the successors of Dhritarashtra, after the Mahabharata War, Takshaka, the King of Gandhara, might have marched against Hastinapura and Pareekshit might have died in his attempt to check their attack. The "sarpasatra", referred to in the story might be nothing but the attempts of Janamejaya, the son of Pareekshit, to avenge his father's death.

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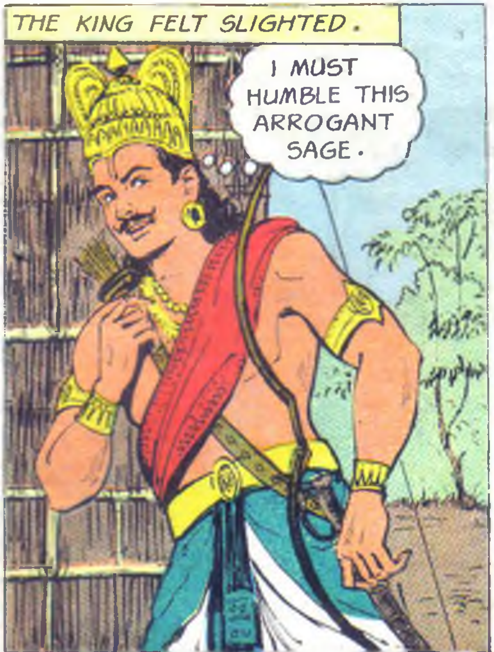
Script: B.R. Bhagwat   Artwork: Prabhakar Khanolkar

PAREEKSHIT

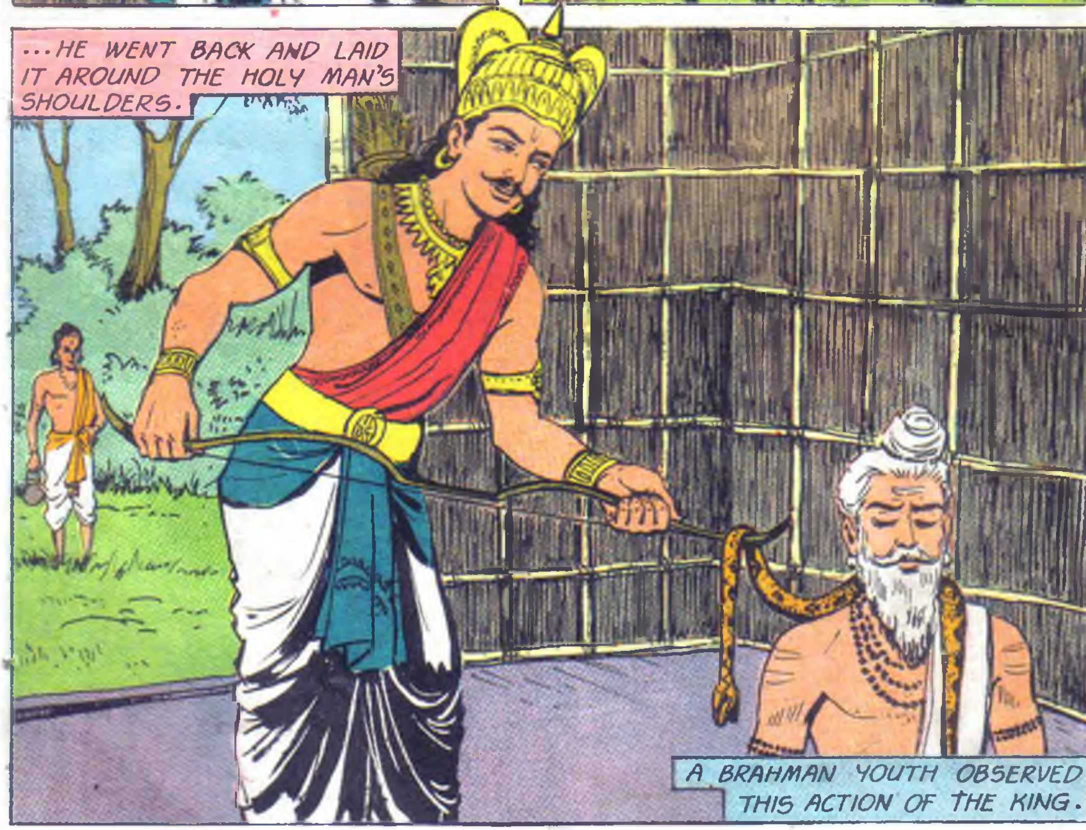

TWO GENERATIONS AFTER THE GREAT MAHABHARATA WAR, HASTINAPURA WAS RULED BY KING PAREEKSHIT, SON OF THE VALIANT ABHIMANYU AND GRANDSON OF THE PANDAVA PRINCE, ARJUNA. HE WAS FOND OF HUNTING.

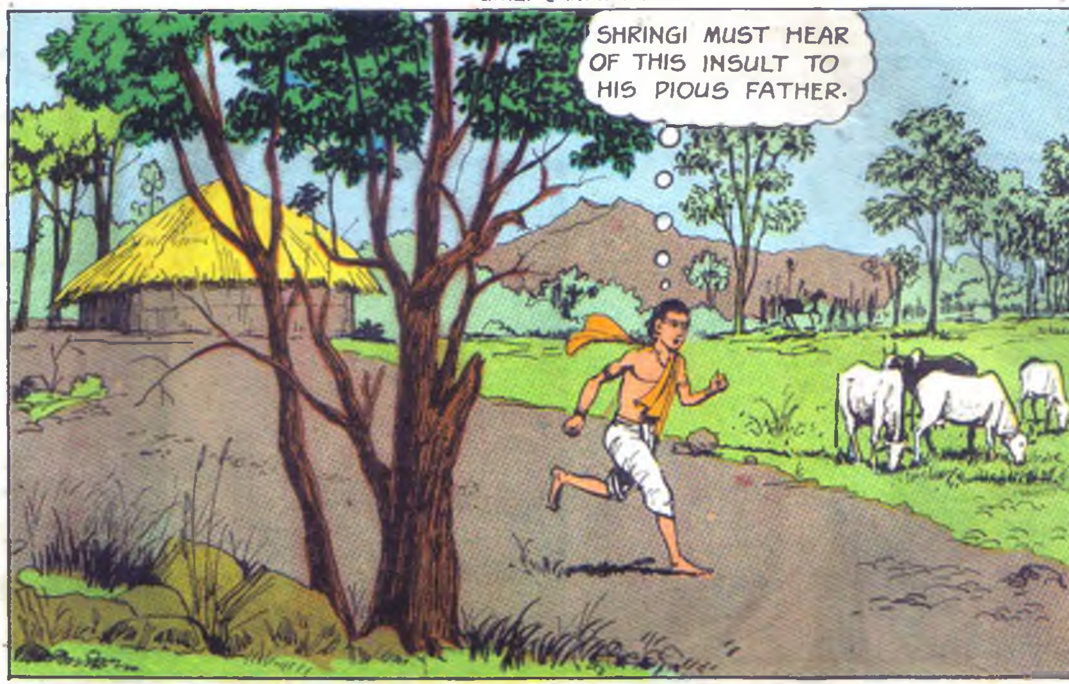


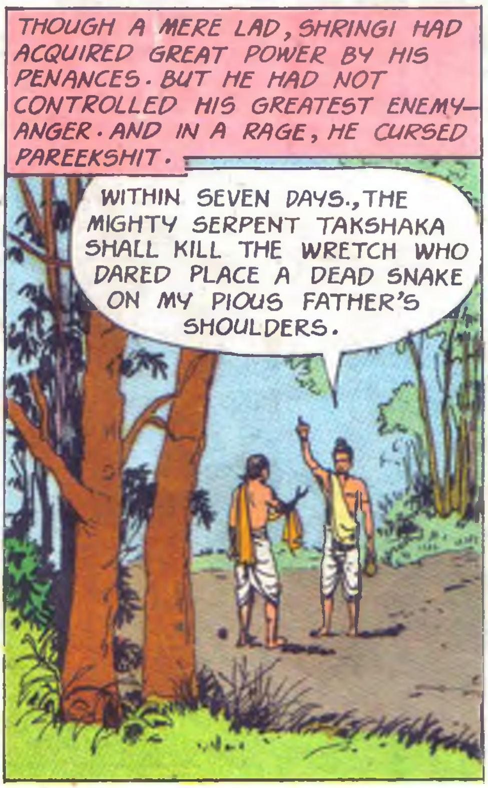
* THE VOW OF SILENCE.


THE KING FELT SLIGHTED.
I MUST HUMBLE THIS ARROGANT SAGE.

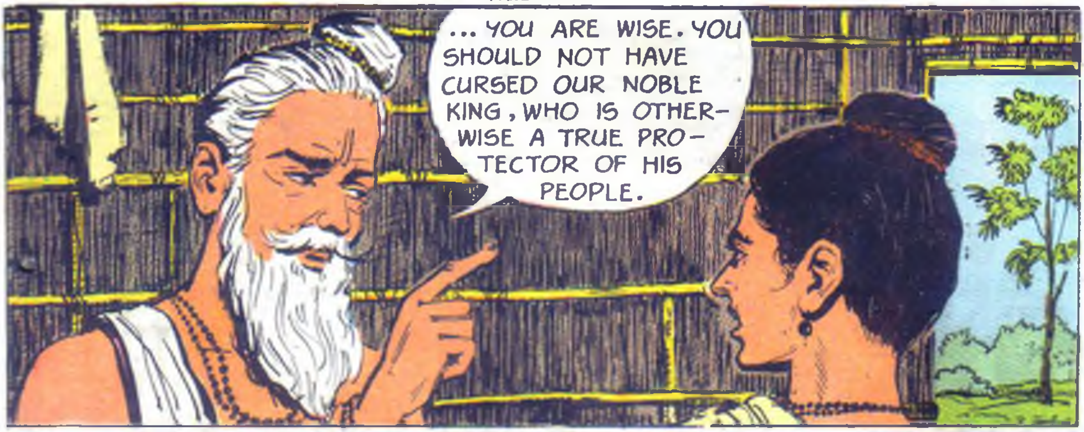

AS HE WALKED OUT OF THE HERMITAGE, HE SAW A DEAD SERPENT. LIFTING IT WITH HIS BOW...

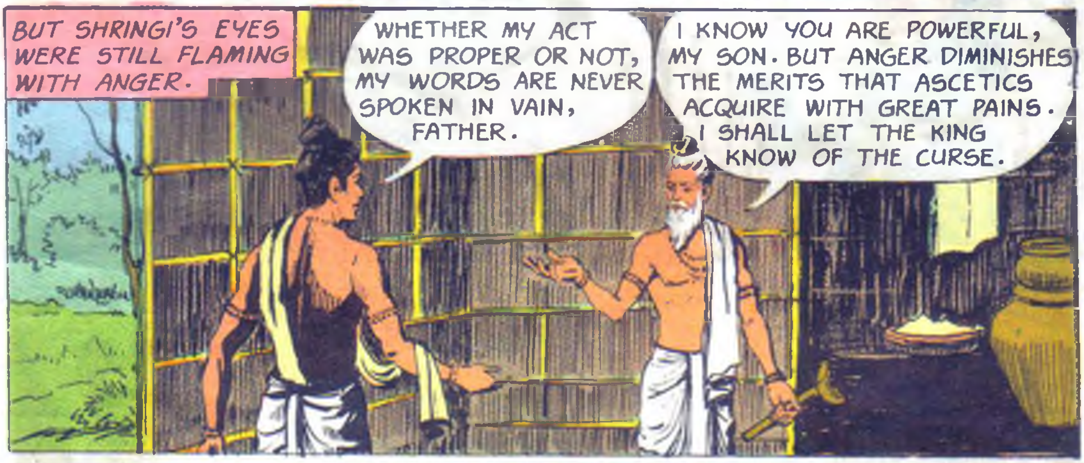

...HE WENT BACK AND LAID IT AROUND THE HOLY MAN'S SHOULDERS.
A BRAHMAN YOUTH OBSERVED THIS ACTION OF THE KING.

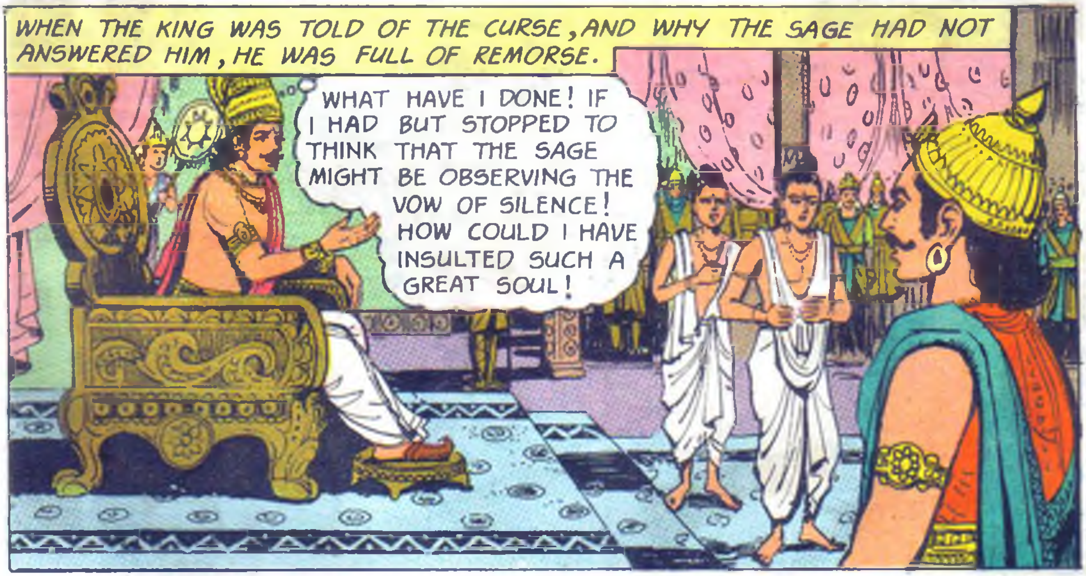

SHRINGI MUST HEAR OF THIS INSULT TO HIS PIOUS FATHER.


THOUGH A MERE LAD, SHRINGI HAD ACQUIRED GREAT POWER BY HIS PENANCES. BUT HE HAD NOT CONTROLLED HIS GREATEST ENEMY— ANGER. AND IN A RAGE, HE CURSED PAREEKSHIT.
WITHIN SEVEN DAYS., THE MIGHTY SERPENT TAKSHAKA SHALL KILL THE WRETCH WHO DARED PLACE A DEAD SNAKE ON MY PIOUS FATHER'S SHOULDERS.


LATER, WHEN THE SAGE HAD BROKEN HIS VOW OF SILENCE, SHRINGI TOLD HIM WHAT HE HAD DONE.
WHAT THE KING DID WAS OUT OF IGNORANCE. HE WAS WEAKENED BY HUNGER AND THIRST THEN.


... YOU ARE WISE. YOU SHOULD NOT HAVE CURSED OUR NOBLE KING, WHO IS OTHERWISE A TRUE PROTECTOR OF HIS PEOPLE.


BUT SHRINGI'S EYES WERE STILL FLAMING WITH ANGER.
WHETHER MY ACT WAS PROPER OR NOT, MY WORDS ARE NEVER SPOKEN IN VAIN, FATHER.
I KNOW YOU ARE POWERFUL, MY SON. BUT ANGER DIMINISHES THE MERITS THAT ASCETICS ACQUIRE WITH GREAT PAINS. I SHALL LET THE KING KNOW OF THE CURSE.


WHEN THE KING WAS TOLD OF THE CURSE, AND WHY THE SAGE HAD NOT ANSWERED HIM, HE WAS FULL OF REMORSE.
WHAT HAVE I DONE! IF I HAD BUT STOPPED TO THINK THAT THE SAGE MIGHT BE OBSERVING THE VOW OF SILENCE! HOW COULD I HAVE INSULTED SUCH A GREAT SOUL!


THE KING CALLED A MEETING OF HIS COUNCILLORS AND TOLD THEM THE WHOLE STORY.
SOMETHING MUST BE DONE TO SAVE THE ROYAL LIFE. IT IS THE WISH OF THE SAGE.
TIME IS SHORT.

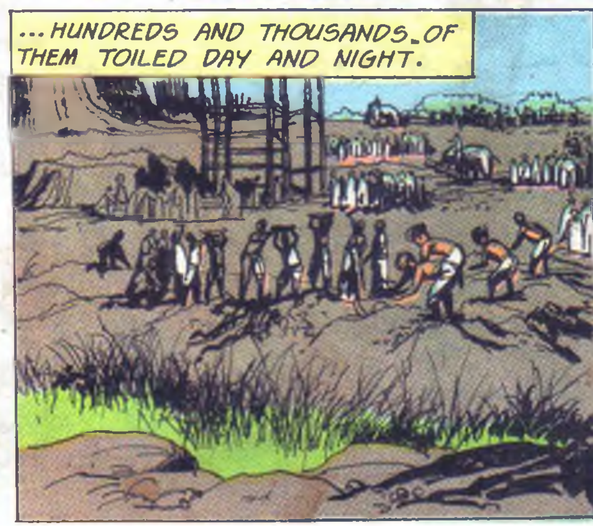

I'VE A PLAN, YOUR MAJESTY.
SPEAK OUT!

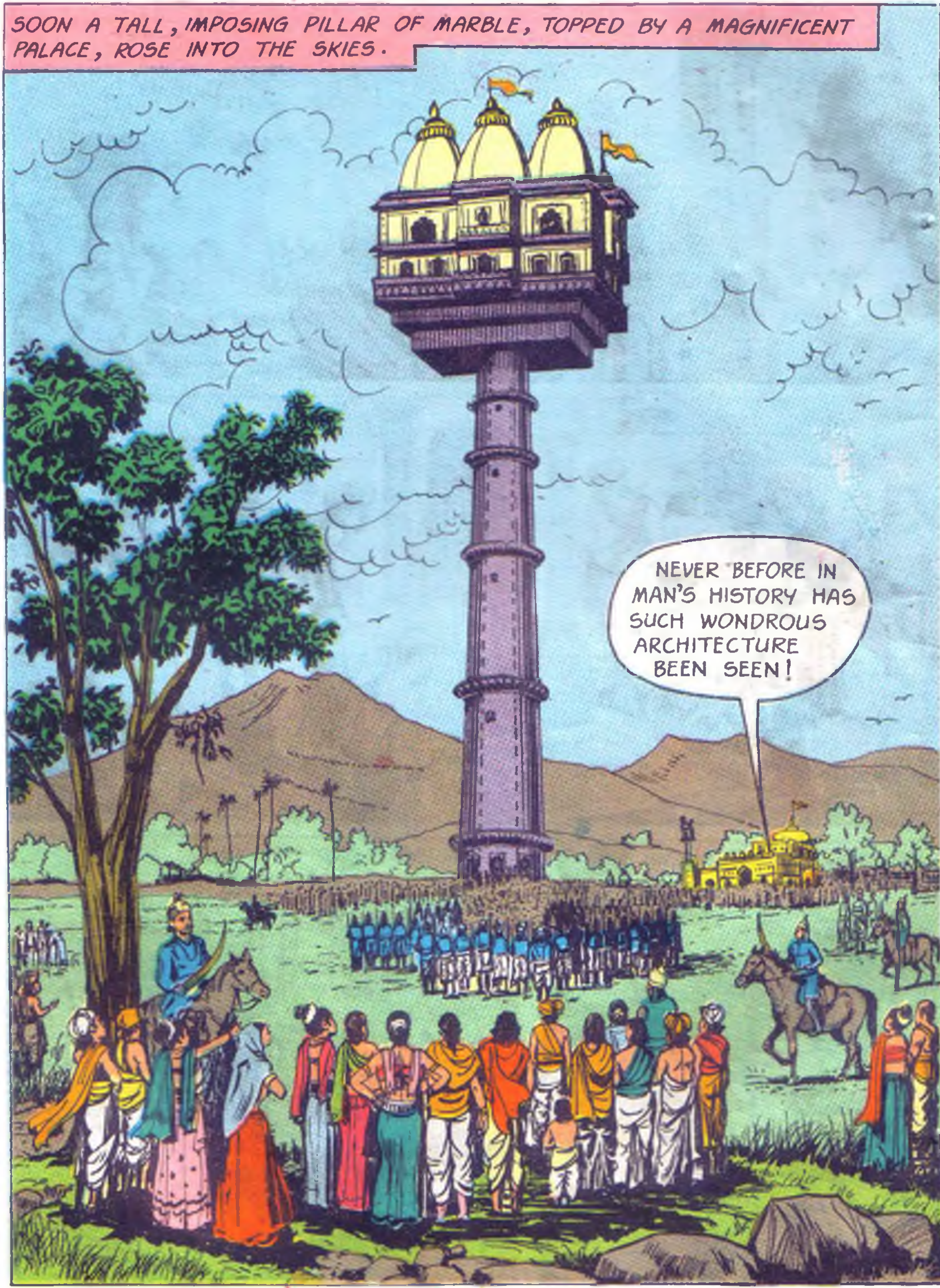

ONE OF THE COUNCILLORS STEPPED FORWARD.
LET US CONSTRUCT A PALACE ON TOP OF A PILLAR.
EVERYONE SEEMED IMPRESSED BY HIS PLAN.

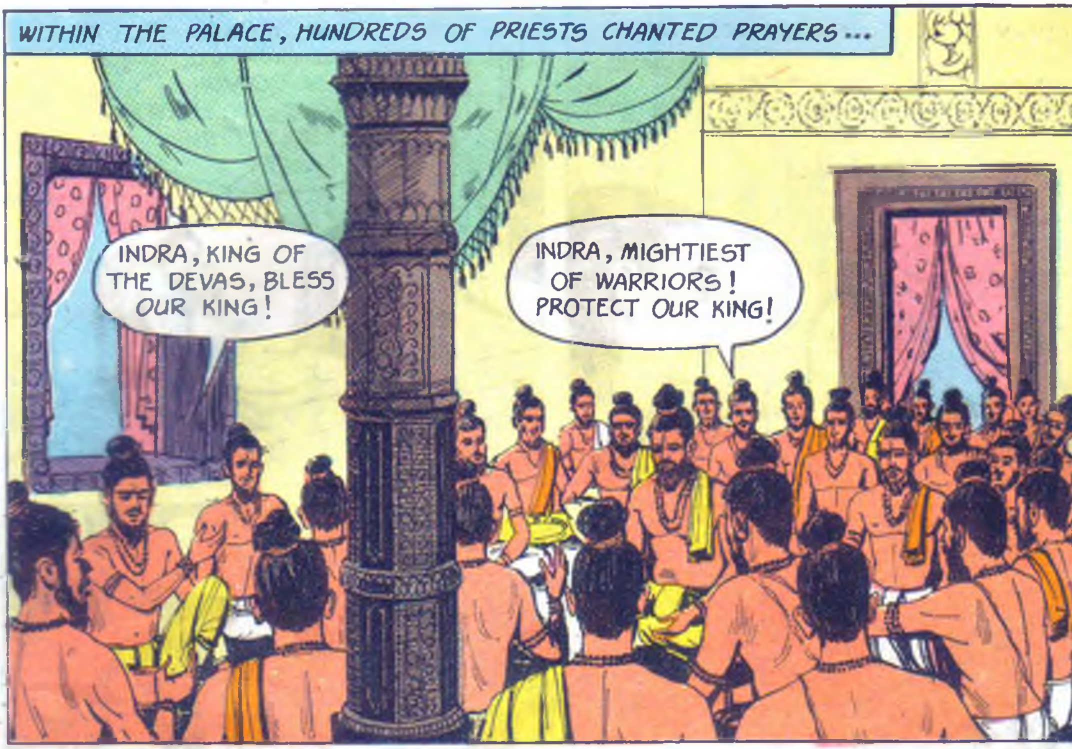

A GOOD IDEA! IT WOULD BE INACCESSIBLE...
...AND EASY TO GUARD!
THEN START WORK ON IT.
I MUST PRESERVE MY LIFE AT ALL COSTS. MY SUBJECTS NEED ME.


PLANS FOR THE PALACE WERE SOON DRAWN UP.

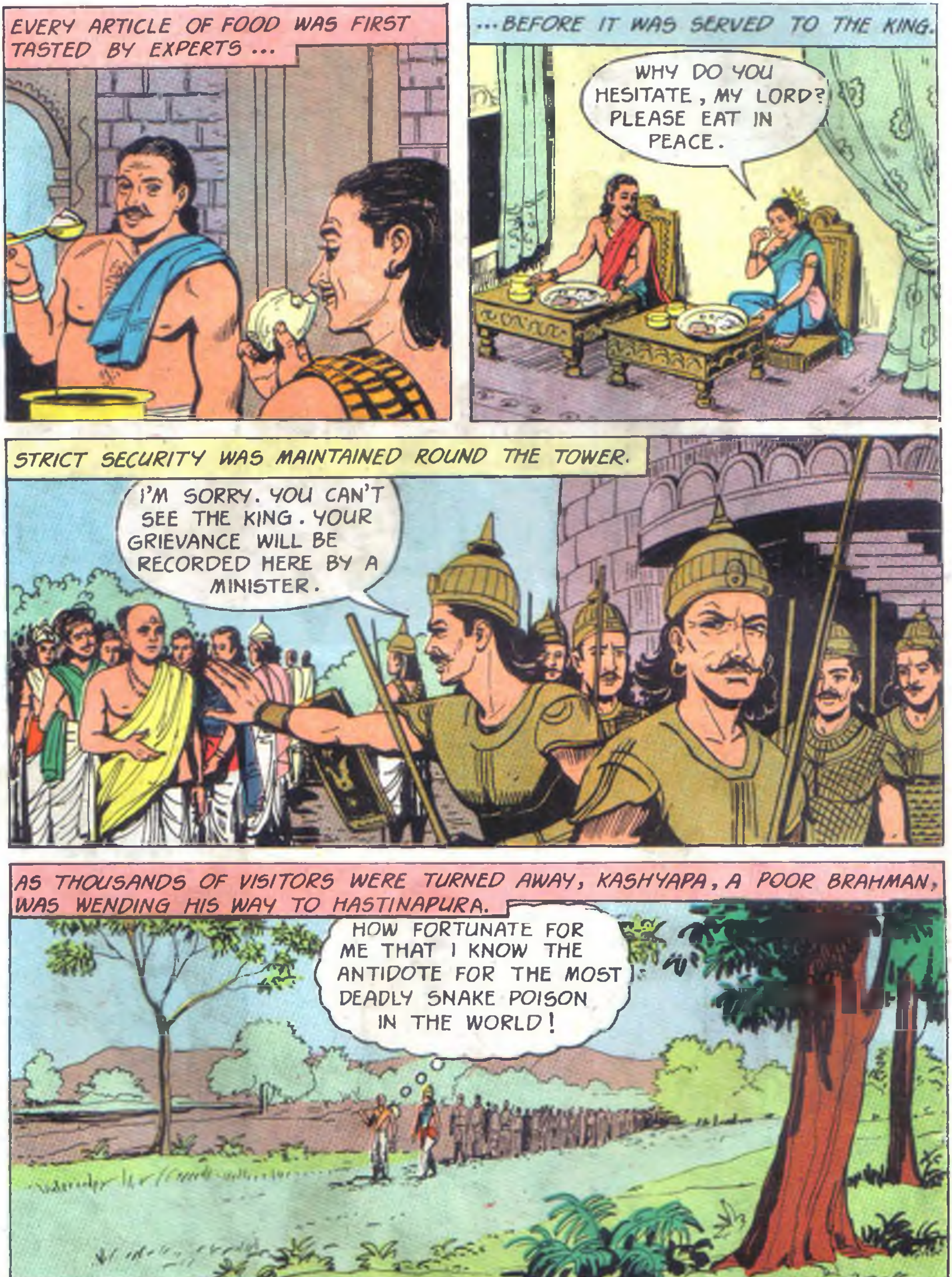

ARTISANS, ENGINEERS AND WORKMEN...

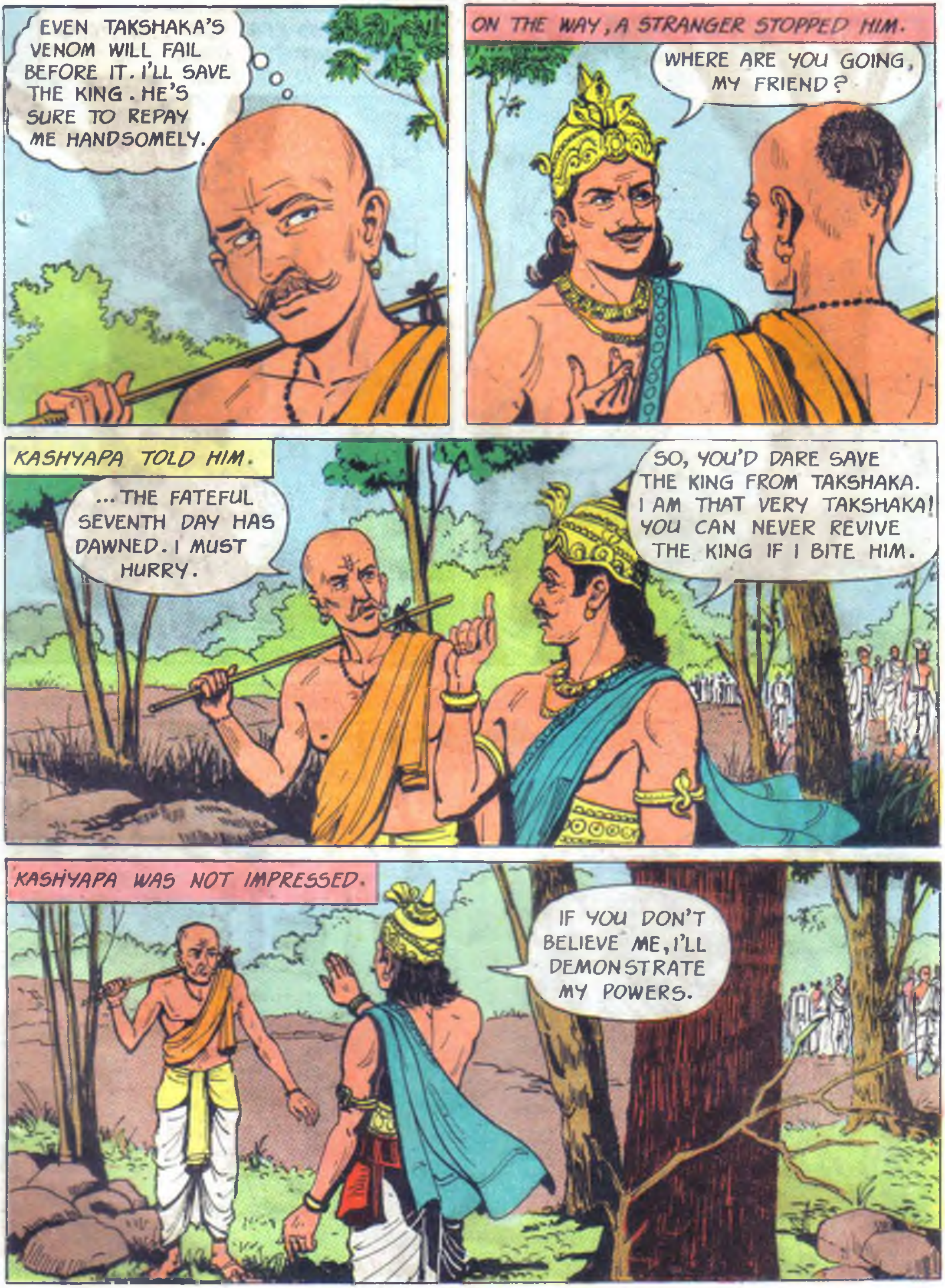

...HUNDREDS AND THOUSANDS OF THEM TOILED DAY AND NIGHT.

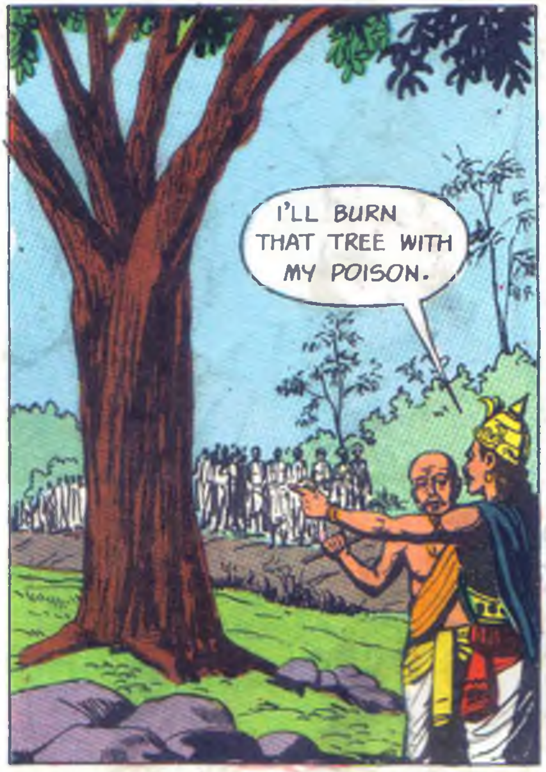

SOON A TALL, IMPOSING PILLAR OF MARBLE, TOPPED BY A MAGNIFICENT PALACE, ROSE INTO THE SKIES.
NEVER BEFORE IN MAN'S HISTORY HAS SUCH WONDROUS ARCHITECTURE BEEN SEEN!


WITHIN THE PALACE, HUNDREDS OF PRIESTS CHANTED PRAYERS...
INDRA, KING OF THE DEVAS, BLESS OUR KING!
INDRA, MIGHTIEST OF WARRIORS! PROTECT OUR KING!

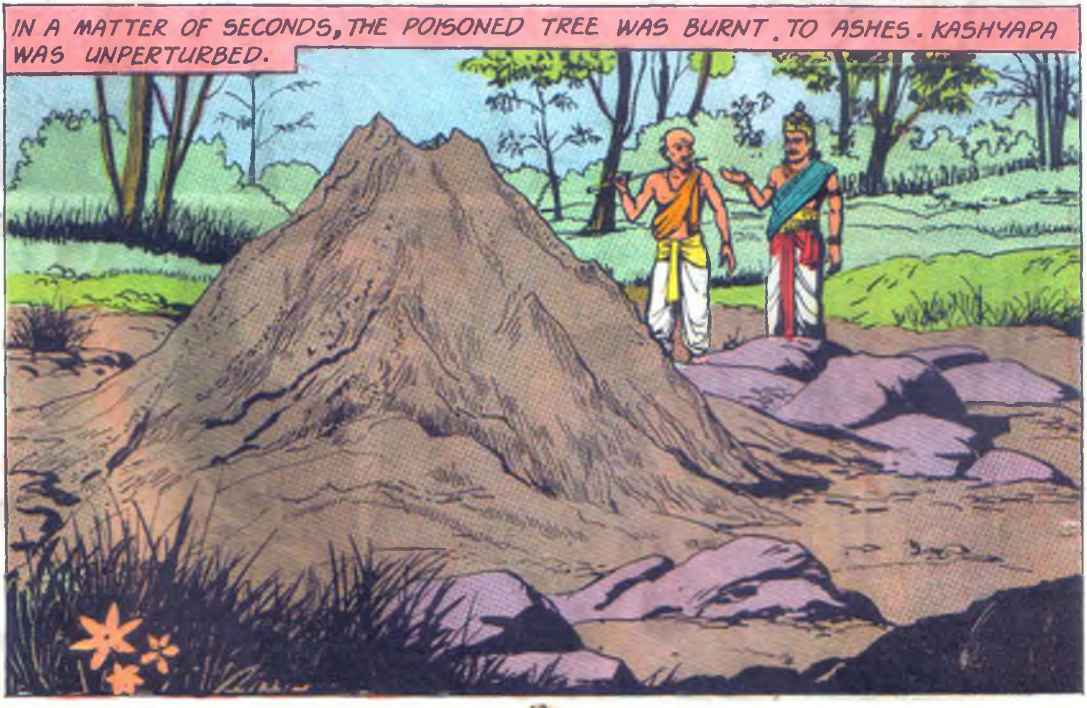

... WHILE PHYSICIANS KEPT A VIGIL ON THE KING'S HEALTH.


EVERY ARTICLE OF FOOD WAS FIRST TASTED BY EXPERTS ...
...BEFORE IT WAS SERVED TO THE KING.
WHY DO YOU HESITATE, MY LORD? PLEASE EAT IN PEACE.
STRICT SECURITY WAS MAINTAINED ROUND THE TOWER.
I'M SORRY. YOU CAN'T SEE THE KING. YOUR GRIEVANCE WILL BE RECORDED HERE BY A MINISTER.
AS THOUSANDS OF VISITORS WERE TURNED AWAY, KASHYAPA, A POOR BRAHMAN, WAS WENDING HIS WAY TO HASTINAPURA.
HOW FORTUNATE FOR ME THAT I KNOW THE ANTIDOTE FOR THE MOST DEADLY SNAKE POISON IN THE WORLD!

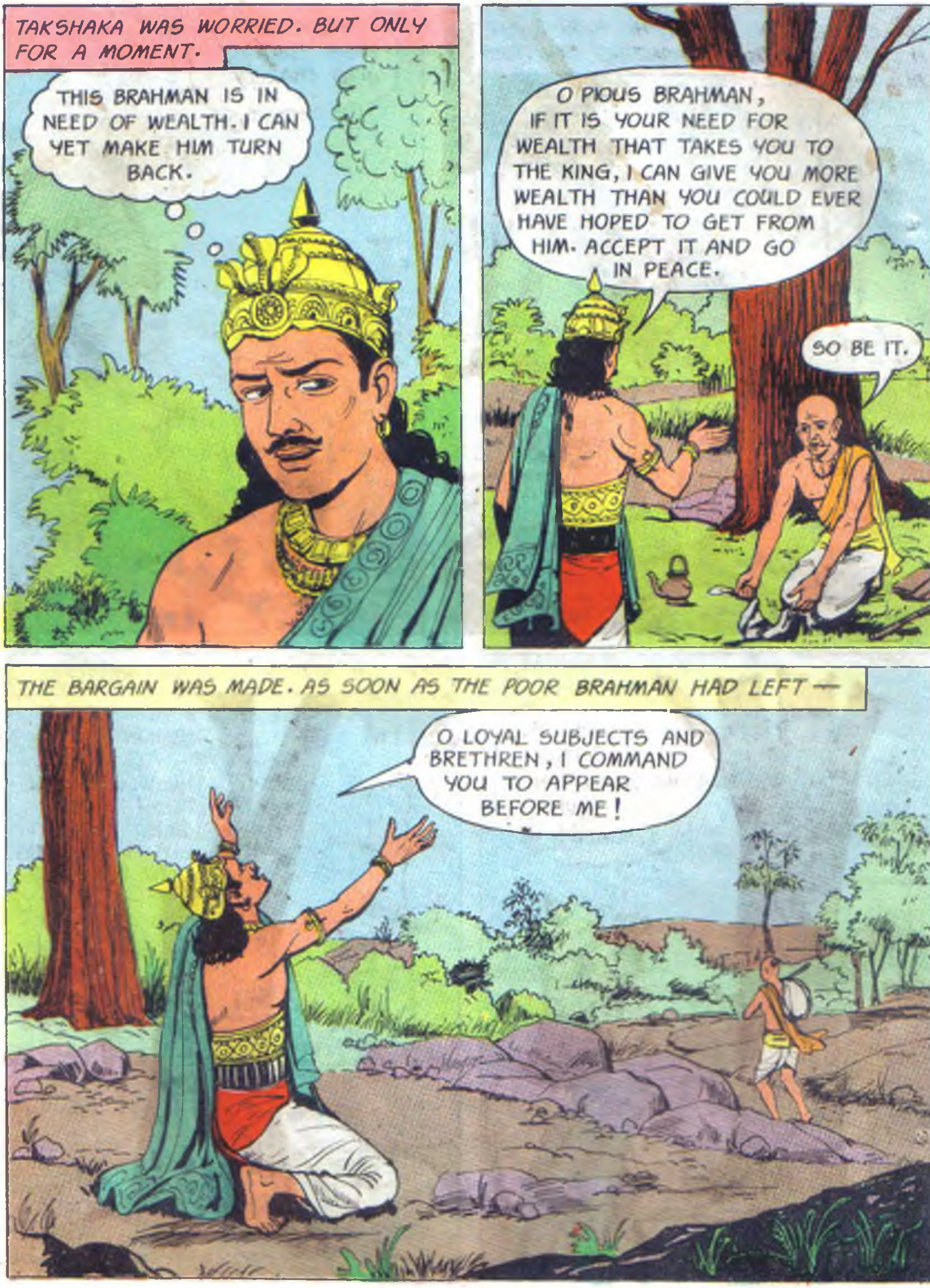

EVEN TAKSHAKA'S VENOM WILL FAIL BEFORE IT. I'LL SAVE THE KING. HE'S SURE TO REPAY ME HANDSOMELY.
ON THE WAY, A STRANGER STOPPED HIM.
WHERE ARE YOU GOING, MY FRIEND?
KASHYAPA TOLD HIM.
...THE FATEFUL SEVENTH DAY HAS DAWNED. I MUST HURRY.
SO, YOU'D DARE SAVE THE KING FROM TAKSHAKA. I AM THAT VERY TAKSHAKA! YOU CAN NEVER REVIVE THE KING IF I BITE HIM.
KASHYAPA WAS NOT IMPRESSED.
IF YOU DON'T BELIEVE ME, I'LL DEMONSTRATE MY POWERS.


I'LL BURN THAT TREE WITH MY POISON.

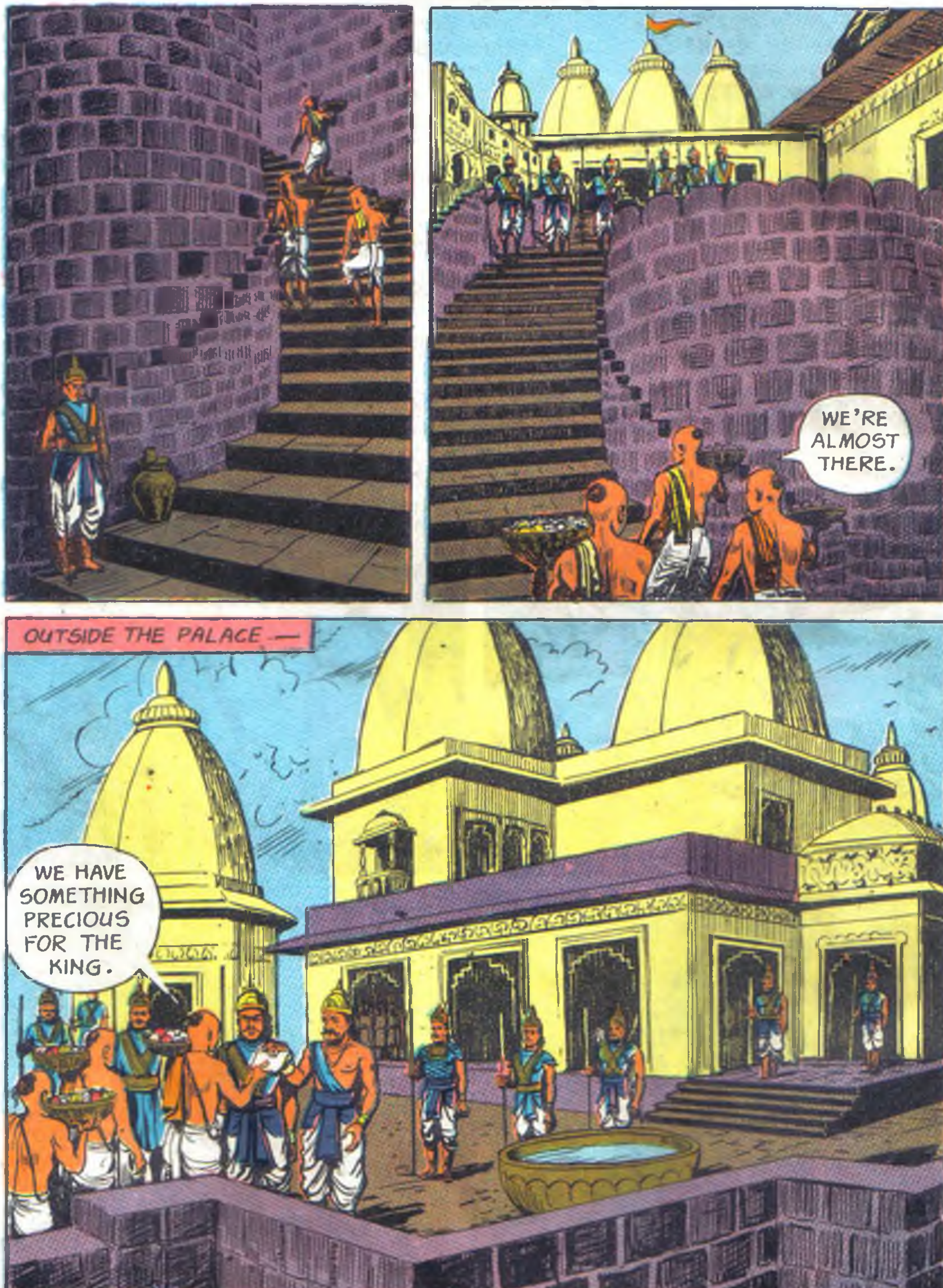

ASSUMING HIS REAL FORM, TAKSHAKA ENTWINED HIMSELF ROUND THE TREE AND BIT INTO ITS BARK.


IN A MATTER OF SECONDS, THE POISONED TREE WAS BURNT TO ASHES. KASHYAPA WAS UNPERTURBED.


COLLECTING THE ASHES, HE SPRINKLED A LIQUID ON THEM, CHANTING MANTRAS ALL THE WHILE.
THE ASHES HAVE TURNED INTO CHARCOAL!
THE CHARCOAL IS BECOMING WOOD... BRAN-CHES HAVE FORMED!
SOON THE WHOLE TREE WAS REVIVED.
IF HE REVIVES THE KING AFTER MY FATAL BITE, THE WORLD WILL LAUGH AT ME. I MUST PREVENT HIM FROM GOING TO THE KING.


TAKSHAKA WAS WORRIED. BUT ONLY FOR A MOMENT.
THIS BRAHMAN IS IN NEED OF WEALTH. I CAN YET MAKE HIM TURN BACK.
O PIOUS BRAHMAN, IF IT IS YOUR NEED FOR WEALTH THAT TAKES YOU TO THE KING, I CAN GIVE YOU MORE WEALTH THAN YOU COULD EVER HAVE HOPED TO GET FROM HIM. ACCEPT IT AND GO IN PEACE.
SO BE IT.
THE BARGAIN WAS MADE. AS SOON AS THE POOR BRAHMAN HAD LEFT —
O LOYAL SUBJECTS AND BRETHREN, I COMMAND YOU TO APPEAR BEFORE ME!

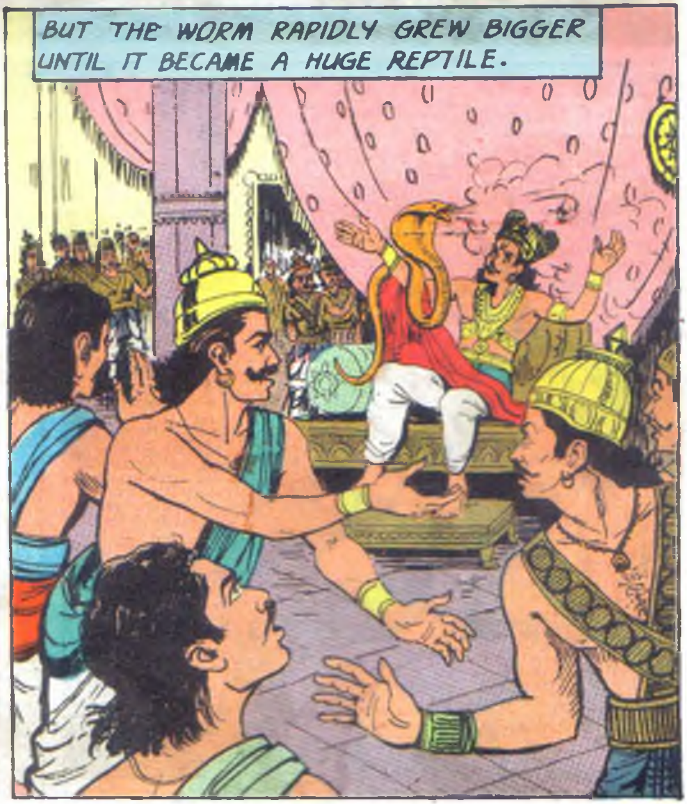

AS THE SNAKES IN THE VICINITY BEGAN TO MAKE THEIR APPEARANCE —
YOU SHALL BECOME BRAHMANS AND CARRY BASKETS OF FRUITS FOR THE KING!
TAKSHAKA THEN REDUCED HIMSELF TO THE SIZE OF A WORM AND BORED HIS WAY INTO ONE OF THE FRUITS.
LATER, AT THE BASE OF THE PILLAR —
HALT! YOU MAY NOT ENTER.
BUT WE'RE WELL-WISHERS OF THE KING. WE WANT TO PRESENT THESE FRUITS TO HIS MAJESTY.
THEY'RE HARMLESS BRAHMANS. LET THEM ENTER.


WE'RE ALMOST THERE.
OUTSIDE THE PALACE —
WE HAVE SOMETHING PRECIOUS FOR THE KING.

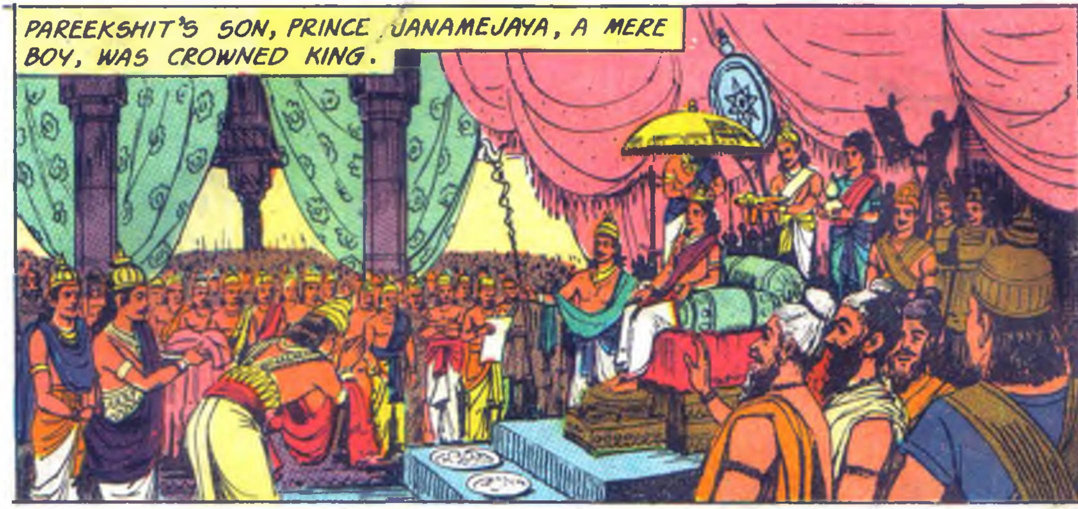

MAY YOU LIVE LONG, O KING!
THEY'VE BROUGHT SOME MEDICATED FRUITS TO GUARD YOUR MAJESTY AGAINST SERPENT VENOM.
THE KING PICKED UP ONE OF THE FRUITS AND TOOK A BITE.
WHAT'S THIS?
IT'S A WORM! THROW IT AWAY, YOUR MAJESTY.

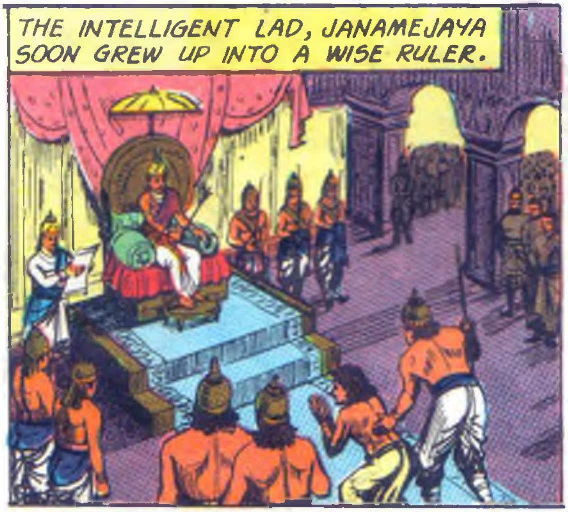

IT IS SAID THAT WORMS INFEST ONLY THE TASTIEST OF FRUIT. I'LL REMOVE IT AND EAT THE FRUIT.


HE PLACED THE WORM ON HIS SHOULDER.
SOON THE SUN WILL SET. I'LL BE FREE FROM HARM!

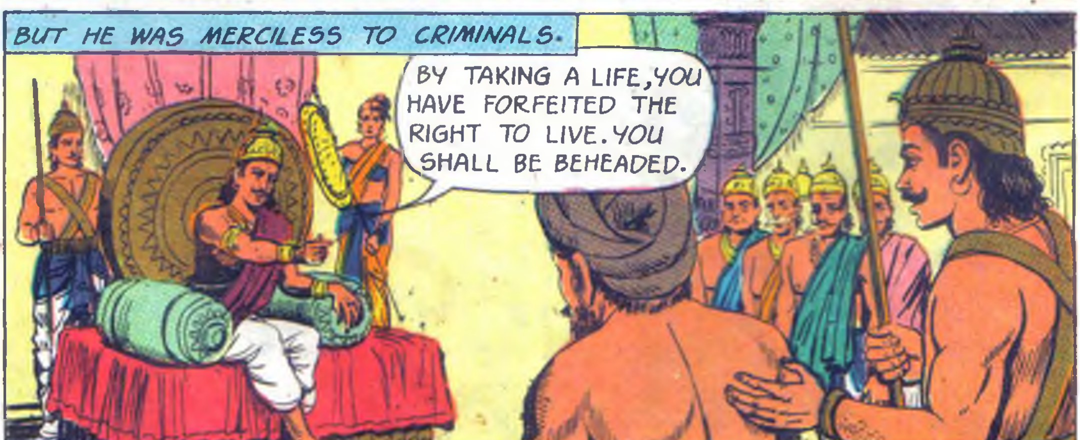

BUT THE WORM RAPIDLY GREW BIGGER UNTIL IT BECAME A HUGE REPTILE.

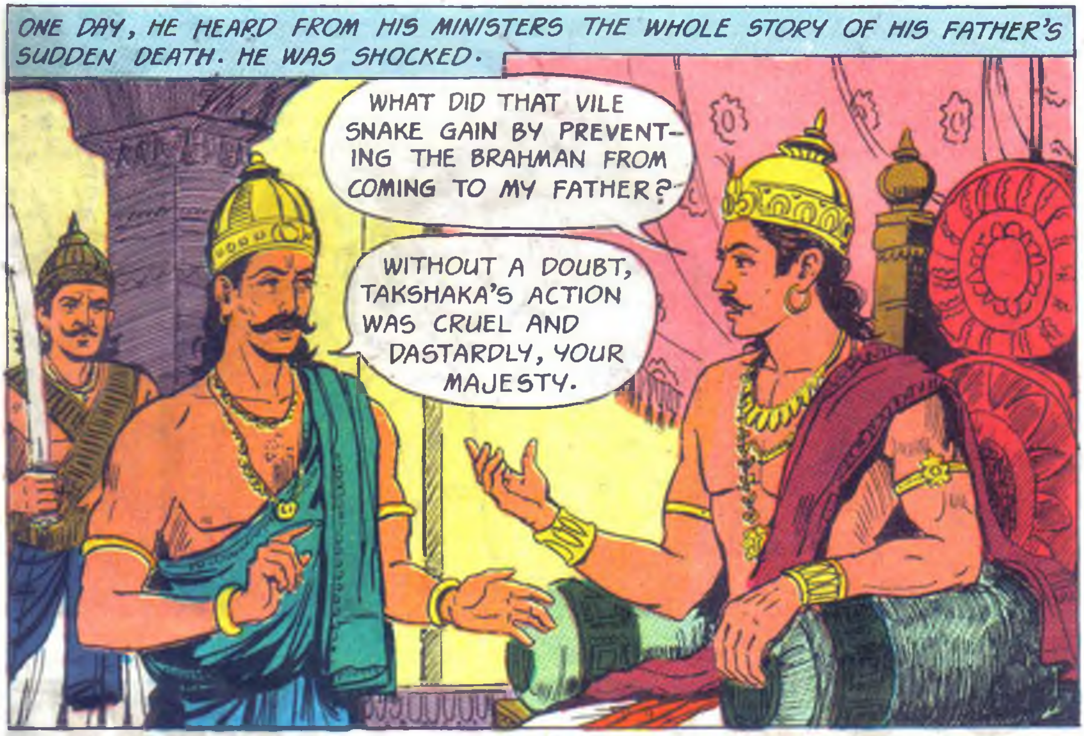

IT STRANGLED - THE KING...
... BIT HIM AND DISAPPEARED THROUGH THE WINDOW WITH A MIGHTY SWISH.
IT WAS TAKSHAKA!
WHEN THEY LOOKED OUT OF THE WINDOW, ALL THEY COULD SEE WAS A STREAK OF LIGHTNING.
OH, LORD! THE KING IS DEAD!

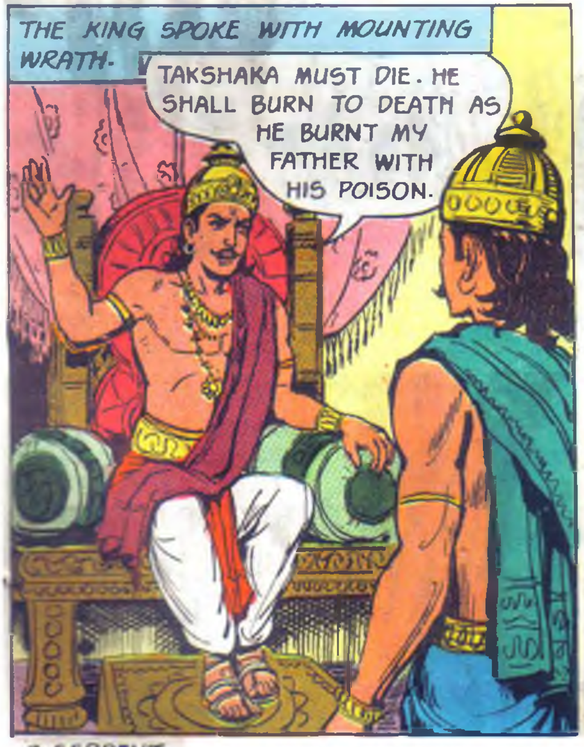

PAREEKSHIT'S SON, PRINCE JANAMEJAYA, A MERE BOY, WAS CROWNED KING.


THE INTELLIGENT LAD, JANAMEJAYA SOON GREW UP INTO A WISE RULER.


HE WAS GOOD TO ALL HIS SUBJECTS AND DEALT KINDLY WITH PETTY FAULTS.
IT WAS HUNGER THAT MADE HIM STEAL. RELEASE THE POOR THIEF AND GIVE HIM FOOD!


BUT HE WAS MERCILESS TO CRIMINALS.
BY TAKING A LIFE, YOU HAVE FORFEITED THE RIGHT TO LIVE. YOU SHALL BE BEHEADED.


ONE DAY, HE HEARD FROM HIS MINISTERS THE WHOLE STORY OF HIS FATHER'S SUDDEN DEATH. HE WAS SHOCKED.
WHAT DID THAT VILE SNAKE GAIN BY PREVENTING THE BRAHMAN FROM COMING TO MY FATHER?
WITHOUT A DOUBT, TAKSHAKA'S ACTION WAS CRUEL AND DASTARDLY, YOUR MAJESTY.


THE KING SPOKE WITH MOUNTING WRATH.
TAKSHAKA MUST DIE. HE SHALL BURN TO DEATH AS HE BURNT MY FATHER WITH HIS POISON.

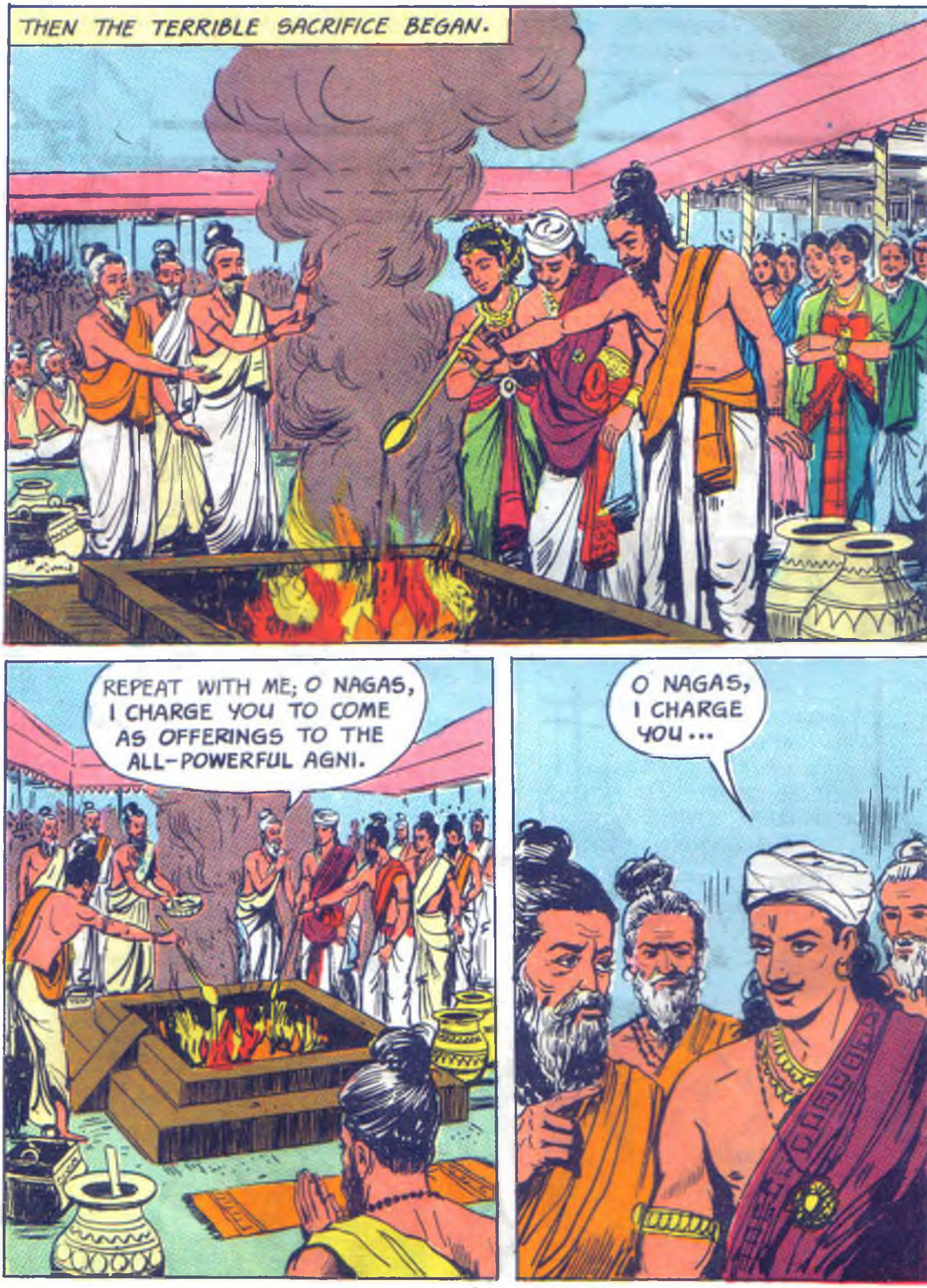

INDEED! I WILL NOT REST TILL EVERY NAGA* IN THE WORLD IS DESTROYED.

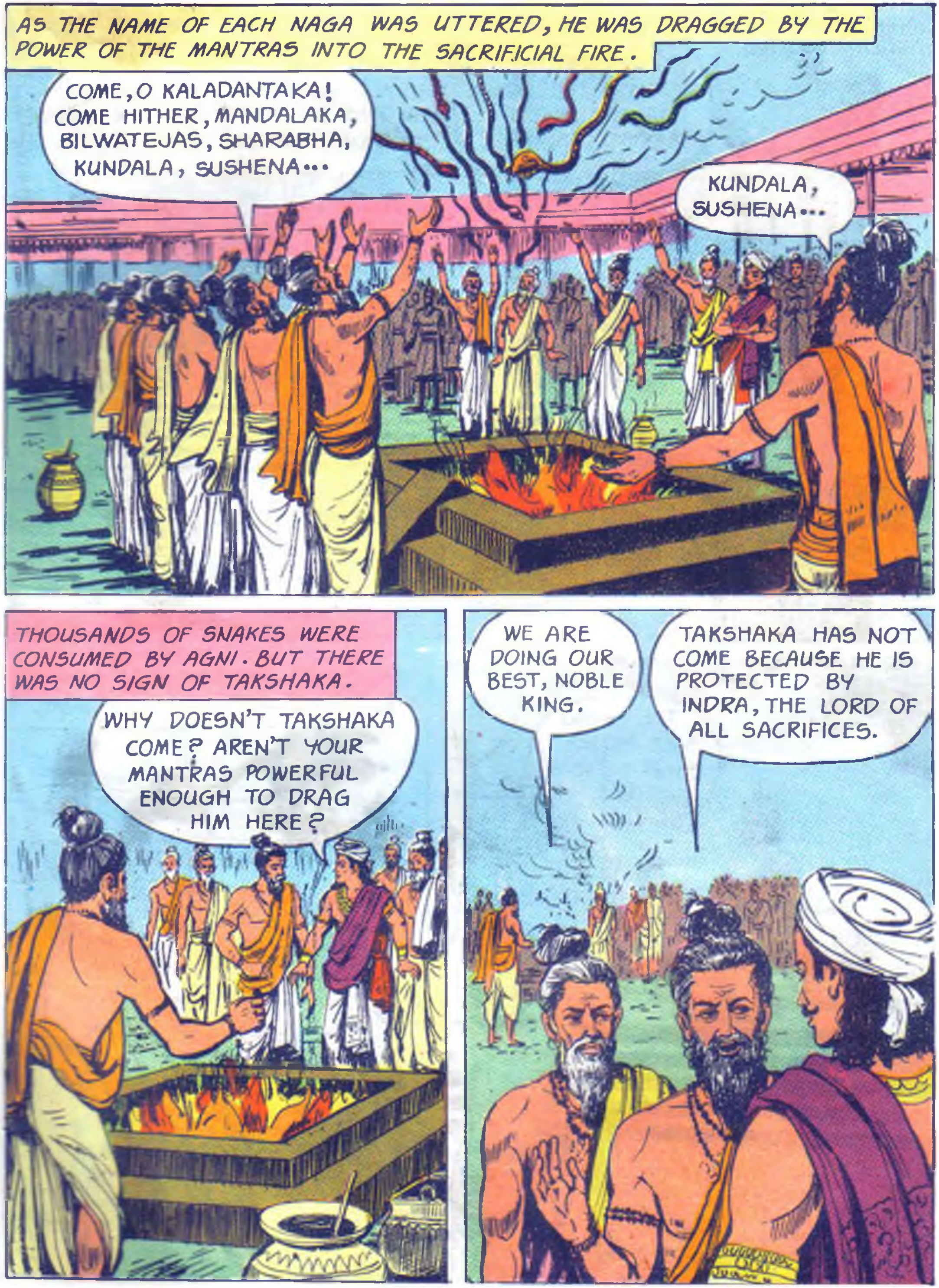
* SERPENT.

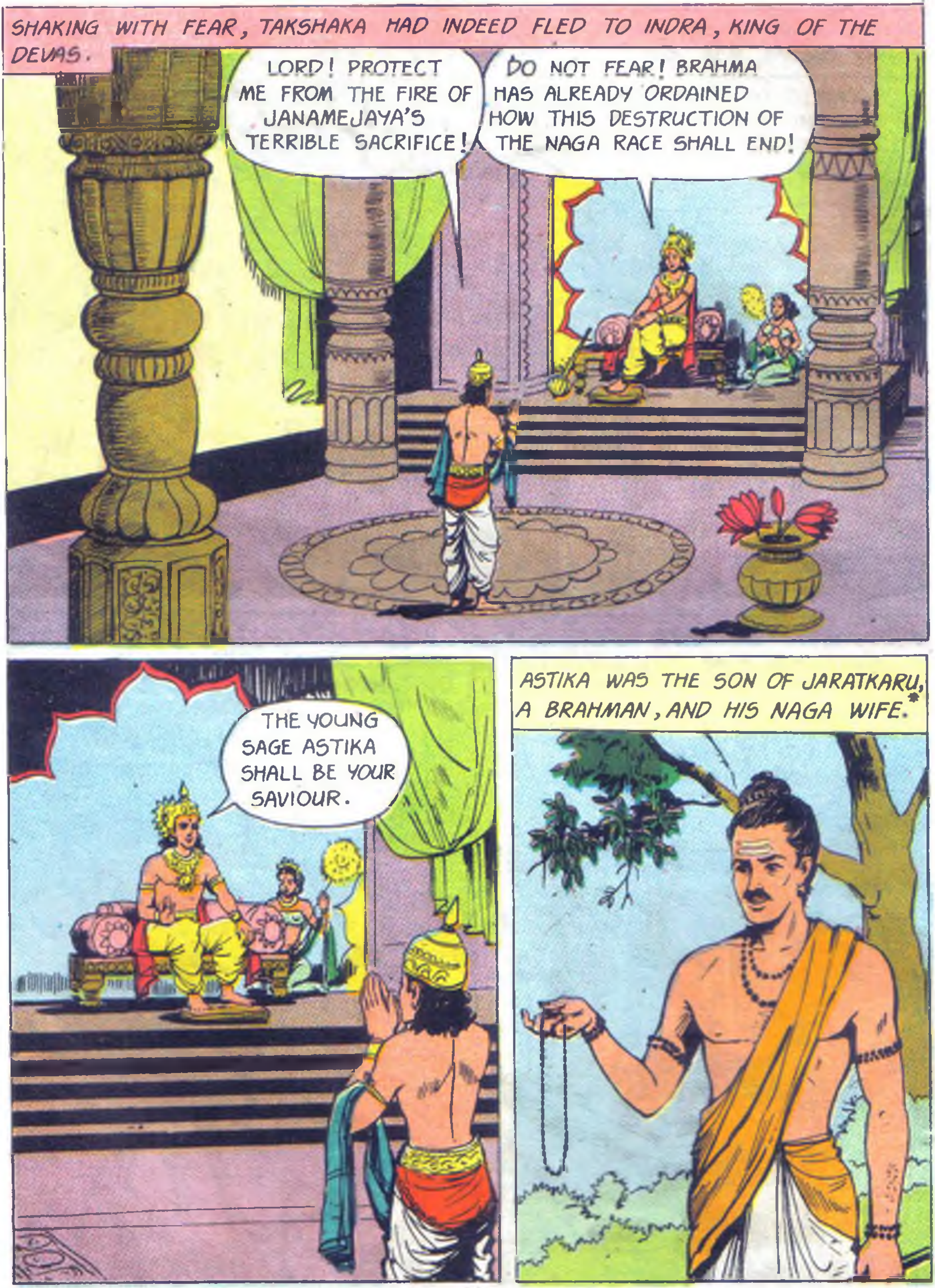


* THE SNAKE SACRIFICE.

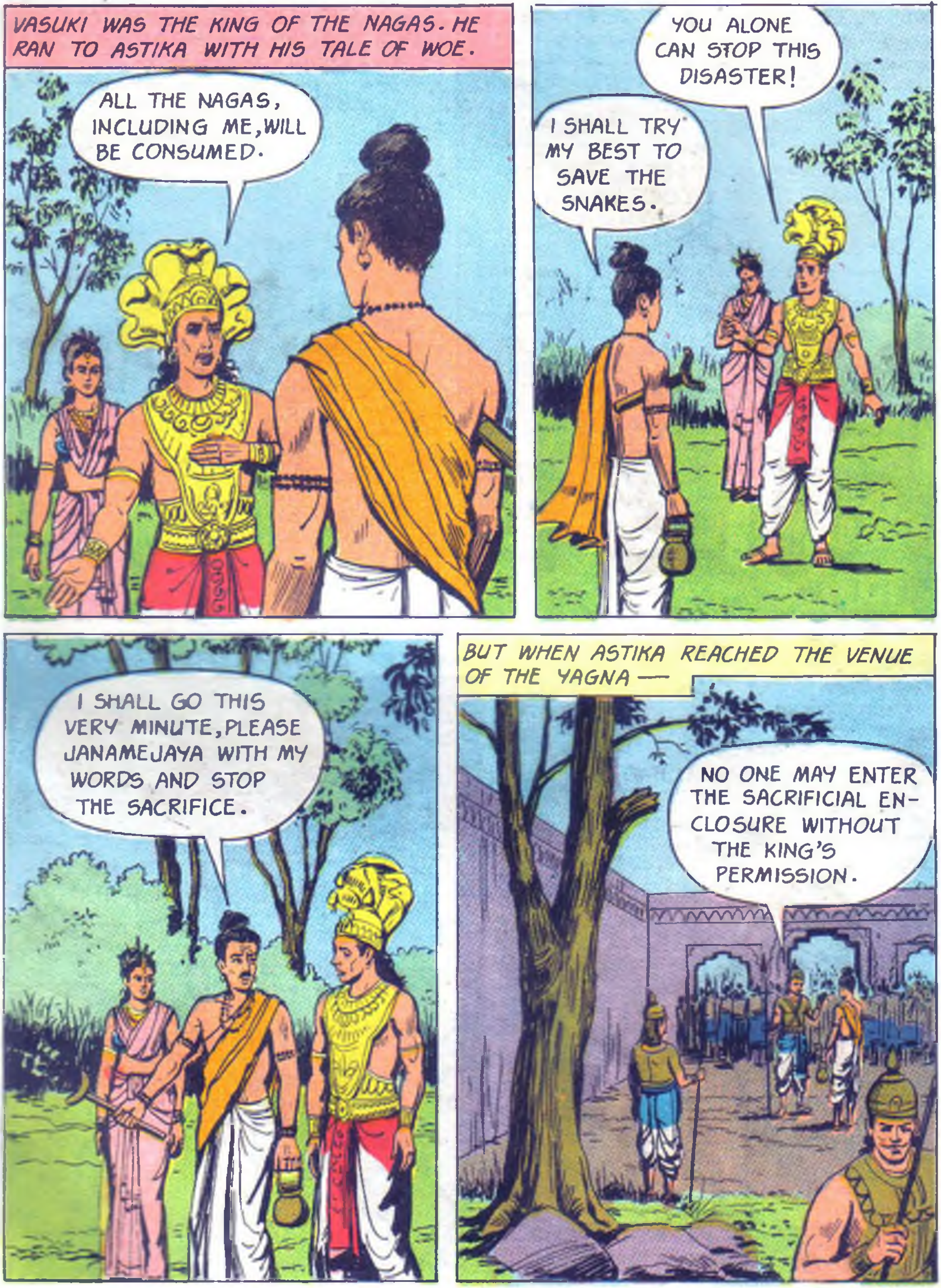

MASONS AND CARPENTERS STARTED BUILDING THE HOLY ALTAR, HOUSED IN A MAGNIFICENT MANDAP.
THE PLACE AND TIME SELECTED FOR RAISING THE ALTAR ARE NOT FAVOURABLE.
YOU ARE RIGHT.
OUR KING DOES NOT KNOW IT BUT THIS SACRIFICE WILL NOT BE COMPLETED. IT WILL BE STOPPED BY A BRAHMAN.
THE PRIME MINISTER WHO OVERHEARD THESE REMARKS SPOKE TO THE KING. DETERMINED TO SUCCEED IN HIS VENTURE, JANAMEJAYA GAVE ORDERS.
NONE SHALL BE ALLOWED ENTRY INTO THE SACRIFICIAL ENCLOSURE WITHOUT MY PERMISSION.


THEN THE TERRIBLE SACRIFICE BEGAN.
REPEAT WITH ME; O NAGAS, I CHARGE YOU TO COME AS OFFERINGS TO THE ALL-POWERFUL AGNI.
O NAGAS, I CHARGE YOU...


AS THE NAME OF EACH NAGA WAS UTTERED, HE WAS DRAGGED BY THE POWER OF THE MANTRAS INTO THE SACRIFICIAL FIRE.
COME, O KALADANTAKA! COME HITHER, MANDALAKA, BILWATEJAS, SHARABHA, KUNDALA, SUSHENA...
KUNDALA, SUSHENA...
THOUSANDS OF SNAKES WERE CONSUMED BY AGNI. BUT THERE WAS NO SIGN OF TAKSHAKA.
WHY DOESN'T TAKSHAKA COME? AREN'T YOUR MANTRAS POWERFUL ENOUGH TO DRAG HIM HERE?
WE ARE DOING OUR BEST, NOBLE KING.
TAKSHAKA HAS NOT COME BECAUSE HE IS PROTECTED BY INDRA, THE LORD OF ALL SACRIFICES.



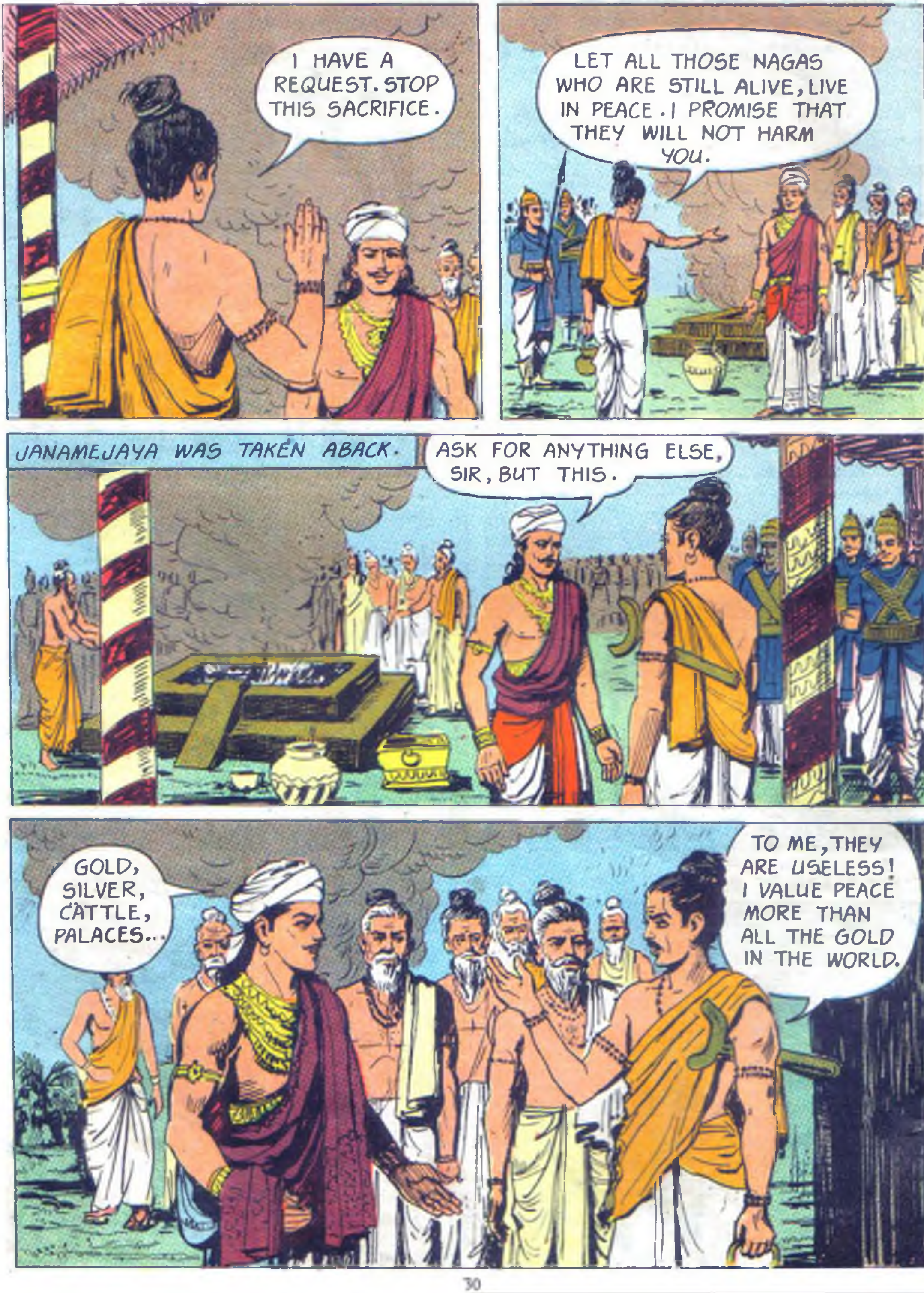
* VASUKI'S SISTER.


VASUKI WAS THE KING OF THE NAGAS. HE RAN TO ASTIKA WITH HIS TALE OF WOE.
ALL THE NAGAS, INCLUDING ME, WILL BE CONSUMED.
YOU ALONE CAN STOP THIS DISASTER!
I SHALL TRY MY BEST TO SAVE THE SNAKES.
I SHALL GO THIS VERY MINUTE, PLEASE JANAMEJAYA WITH MY WORDS AND STOP THE SACRIFICE.
BUT WHEN ASTIKA REACHED THE VENUE OF THE YAGNA —
NO ONE MAY ENTER THE SACRIFICIAL EN-CLOSURE WITHOUT THE KING'S PERMISSION.


INSIDE, THE PRIESTS WERE CHANTING THEIR MANTRAS WITH MOUNTING VEHEMENCE.
TAKSHAKA, I COMMAND THEE TO COME.
LET INDRA COME WITH TAKSHAKA.
SWAHA! SWAHA! SWAHA!
TAKSHAKA AND HIS MIGHTY PROTECTOR WERE DRAGGED TOWARDS THE SACRIFICIAL FIRE.
INDRA LOOKED DOWN ANXIOUSLY WHILE TAKSHAKA CLUNG DESPERATELY TO HIS SHAWL.
I AM POWERLESS TO HELP TAKSHAKA. I HAD BETTER FLEE.
AND INDRA FLED.
TAKSHAKA BEGAN FALLING.
TISHTHA!* TISHTHA!
IT WAS ASTIKA.

* STAY! STAY!


THEN ASTIKA STOOD ON THE SPOT AND BLESSED THE KING. HIS WORDS WERE SWEET MUSIC TO ALL WHO LISTENED.
OH JANAMEJAYA, KING OF KINGS, AS GLORIOUS AS BHEESHMA, AS PEACE-LOVING AS VASISHTHA AND AS DAUNTLESS AS PARASHURAMA...
...LET THIS YAGNA OF YOURS WHICH EXCELS...
...ALL THE YAGNAS PREVIOUSLY PERFORMED BY KING AFTER KING...
...BE A FORERUNNER OF PEACE AND HAPPINESS FOR ALL, INCLUDING THE NAGAS.
THESE WORDS REACHED THE EARS OF JANAMEJAYA. HE TURNED TO HIS GUARDS.
USHER IN THE WISE YOUTH.
PRAY SIR, WHAT DO YOU SEEK? ASK AND IT SHALL BE GIVEN.


I HAVE A REQUEST. STOP THIS SACRIFICE.
LET ALL THOSE NAGAS WHO ARE STILL ALIVE, LIVE IN PEACE. I PROMISE THAT THEY WILL NOT HARM YOU.
JANAMEJAYA WAS TAKEN ABACK.
ASK FOR ANYTHING ELSE, SIR, BUT THIS.
GOLD, SILVER, CATTLE, PALACES...
TO ME, THEY ARE USELESS! I VALUE PEACE MORE THAN ALL THE GOLD IN THE WORLD.


DO WHAT THE BRAHMAN YOUTH ASKS, YOUR MAJESTY.
HE IS TRUTH INCARNATE. YOU CANNOT IGNORE HIM.
HEEDING THE WORDS OF HIS SPIRITUAL ADVISERS, JANAMEJAYA GAVE ORDERS.
STOP THE SACRIFICE.
EVERYONE PRESENT REJOICED, AND JANAMEJAYA KNEW A HAPPINESS HE HAD NEVER KNOWN BEFORE.
WHEN ASTIKA RETURNED HOME, HE WAS HAILED LOVINGLY BY THE NAGAS WHOSE LIVES HE HAD SAVED.
GLORY BE TO ASTIKA!

AMAR CHITRA KATHA

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Acquaint your children with their cultural heritage

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